

God's Sovereignty over health and leadership

We as a church have had consistent, Bible teaching by a pastor who has protected, fed and encouraged us through God's Word for nearly 35 years! Pastor Mike Smith has been the rock this church needed since it's founding. I have been privileged to be trained in pastoral training under the tutelage of Pastor Mike for a few years before entering into seminary training at Chafer Theological Seminary. As a student, I have continued to study God's Word for about 1 ½ years now. Pastor Mike has had a resurgence of the cancer originally found behind his eye. It has moved to his liver, and He has made the difficult decision to focus on his health and step down as the head pastor of this church. I am truly saddened by this, but will stand in the gap to teach, as needed so the deacons can make the tough decisions of finding a new shepherd. Here are some things we need to focus on:

1. We as a church are not to focus on which man teaches, but on keeping our eyes on the Lord. Your deacons will protect the pulpit from unfaithful or false teachers.
2. God promotes who He wants to promote in cases like this. It's not a time to get upset about who you want to fill the roll, but who God will provide for us.
3. It is ok to grieve for pastor Mike stepping down, but it is more important that we support him during this pastoral transition. He and

Kari need our prayers. I would like you all to consider writing a letter to pastor Mike and Kari and thank them for the 35 years of faithful service to the Lord. Give the letter to a deacon and we will make sure pastor Mike receives them. This will eliminate 100 phone calls while he is going through his treatments. Shower them with your love and gratitude.

4. God is the one that can heal, so pray for healing for pastor Mike.

5. God's work is not complete for this generation of believers. God will remove a man from ministry and in His foreknowledge, prepare his replacement. Be optimistic for the future of this church.

6. Positions in the Church body are like those in a business. The Pastor is the top leader, the CEO, then you have others like the Deacons, the Administrative body; they handle all of the church's business and allow the pastor to study and teach, study and teach....they also serve to fulfill the functions of the pastor when he is not present, like protecting the pulpit from false teachers and protecting the flock from destructive intrusion. These Elders also serve in the priestly offering of the Lord's Supper. Then you have Heather and John, the musicians and singers during worship, and what a great job they do...The youth teachers, Fabian and Barbara that prepare our future children to love and serve the Lord, a very important function. There are others too...Have you ever wondered how the flowers outside get planted and cared for? Kelly handles that. How about the flowers that show up in the church each

week? Barbara and Ron handle that each week. Susan does a great job of handling the food planning when we have dinners or fellowships, sometimes for a hundred plus people. Have any of you ever went away hungry? Scott does a great job with the Library too. There are wonderful resources there for anyone who wants to read more. He keeps it very neat too. One of my favorites, Mary, who handles all the correspondence, emails, text and messages with detailed accuracy, keeping all of us informed of what is happening at Country Bible Church, (who is sick, who needs prayer, hospital stays, etc...)

And Cam, who handles so much of the computer tech, many times during the service, to assure all goes according to schedule, and by the way, she makes the bulletins as well. Brett, Vidal, and Cam run the online social media equipment and microphones during the service, as well as serving as Deacons. George, a Deacon and door greeter; you will see him first every Sunday when you arrive, handing you a brochure and a welcome. We have so many unseen workers for the Lord at this church. They are all serving the Lord in their capacity. None less important than the others. It takes all of you. This church is not about one man. Not Pastor Mike, myself or anyone. We are all servants of the Lord. Yes, we lost one of our workers, but the position is open for the man of God to come fill the role, when the time is right. We need to keep our eyes on the Lord.

7. Please give us grace as we work to make this process as smooth as possible for this transition.

So what do we do in the midst of the transition? We have learned in the past what to do. **We pray.** We ask the Lord to guide us and show us what He wants us to do. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

19) Rejoice always; 17) pray without ceasing; 18) in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Do we know why God does what He does? No, He is sovereign and will do what He desires. Isaiah 55:9 says, "For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so My ways are higher than your ways and My thoughts higher than your thoughts. Do we need to know? No. We pray and express our concerns to God. God will hear our prayers and answer us in the way He chooses.

But what if this situation is causing me to suffer? Maybe you might think, I'm grieving this change, Pastor Mike has been here since the beginning, how will anyone fill his shoes?

Prayer through suffering:

Praying through suffering involves bringing raw emotion, pain, and confusion to God, seeking strength and comfort rather than just immediate removal of the trial. The Apostle Paul asked God to remove his affliction, but God said, "My grace is sufficient for you."

Prayer transforms pain into opportunity, to draw closer to God, fostering endurance and trust in His purposes, even when answers may not be immediately visible.

Psalm 34:18 (God is near the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit), Romans 12:12 (be joyful in hope, be patient in affliction, faithful in prayer), 2 Corinthians 12:9 (My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness).

Suffering through life's trials is how we grow spiritually. This is just another trial, another test.....So, how will you respond? Do you want to be in God's will, or do you want to be in a pity party? I think you would answer you want to be in God's will. So, how do I do that? I want to serve God, I don't want to worry, but I have other thoughts, I am afraid. I think....stop! Surrender to God's will. These are mental attitude sins.

Acknowledge them to the Lord and move on. (1 John 1:9)

Surrendering to God's will:

Surrendering to God's will involves releasing control, trusting His plan, and finding peace in His timing. It is a humble acknowledgement that His path is higher than our own, often expressed through prayers that surrender daily stresses, futures, and personal desires to Him.

Proverbs 3:5-6 (5. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6. In all your ways submit to Him and He will

make your paths straight), Galatians 2:20 (I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.), and Luke 22:42 an example from Jesus' prayer to God the Father, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from Me; not My will, but yours be done."

God is in control! You must align with His will if you desire to surrender to it. God is sovereign, He makes His decisions. Who are we to challenge His decisions? Job challenged God's decisions.

Satan was prowling around the earth, and God suggested he test Job, a righteous upright man. God told Satan he was like no other man. God allowed Satan to try to see if Job would curse Him during suffering. Satan first removed his wealth and Job still praised God. Then he took his possessions and Job praised God, then Satan killed his children and Job handled the trial without cursing God. Then his health was taken and he was given boils all over his body that were painful. Job grew weak in his trial, but didn't curse God, he curses his own existence. His wife tells him to give up, and his friends give him bad advice when they see him struggling, but he does not listen to them. Job, however, has himself a pity party. God was not pleased with this response from Job, God had blessed him tremendously in his life.

Here was God's response to him in Job 38:1-7.

Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm. He said:

2. “Who is this that obscures my plans
with words without knowledge?
3. Brace yourself like a man;
I will question you,
and you shall answer me.
4. “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?
Tell me, if you understand.
5. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!
Who stretched a measuring line across it?
6. On what were its footings set,
or who laid its cornerstone
7. while the morning stars sang together
and all the angels shouted for joy?

God spoke more to this as the chapter continues, but my point is this, God can and does allow bad things to happen to good people. We should still praise God, even in our suffering, because we never know what God’s intent is in our suffering. In this case, God was using Job, as a righteous man, to defeat the desires of Satan. The Angelic conflict rages on behind the Scenes. We don’t get to see “why this happened” when we are in the storm, we just have to trust the Lord through it. Our attitude in the midst of the storm is what is most important. Job learned this in a very difficult way.

Sometimes change can bring about very special outcomes. Let's watch what God does in this church. He is infinitely powerful and loves us!

What else can we do in this temporary trial? In Numbers 27:15-23 below, we see Moses asking God to appoint a new leader for Israel, ensuring the community is not left like "sheep without a shepherd".

- 15 Then Moses spoke to the LORD, saying,
16 "May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation,
17 who will go out and come in before them, and who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the LORD will not be like sheep which have no shepherd."
18 So the LORD said to Moses, "Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him;
19 and have him stand before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and commission him in their sight.
20 "You shall put some of your authority on him, in order that all the congregation of the sons of Israel may obey *him*.
21 "Moreover, he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the LORD. At his command they shall go out and at his command they shall come in, *both* he and the sons of Israel with him, even all the congregation."

The judgment of the Urim – The sacred process by which the high priest of ancient Israel used to determine God's will on crucial matters. It represents a divine guidance or decision making.

- 22 Moses did just as the LORD commanded him; and he took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation.
23 Then he laid his hands on him and commissioned him, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses.

The leadership of this church, the Deacon body, are looking to the Lord for guidance; to find the right Shepherd for this church. God will show us who that will be. We are in no way needing to rush the process though. I am available to teach in the interim, and there will be others who will come to teach as well. Remember, it is not about the man we want, but about who God puts in place.

Romans 8:28 - And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.

We are called to God's purpose church! God is in control. We need not fear the future outcome for the shepherd's roll to be filled. God will provide for the need.

Please turn to John 20: 11-18 I would like to show you something.

- 11 But, Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb;
- 12 and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying.
- 13 and they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him."
- 14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing *there*, and did not know that it was Jesus.
- 15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, "Sir,

- if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.”
- 16 Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, “Rabboni!” (which means, Teacher).
- 17 Jesus said to her, “Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, “I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.”
- 18 Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” and *that* He had said these things to her.

1. Mary had not recognized Jesus, because she had just witnessed the brutal crucifixion of Him and as far as what Mary and the Disciples believed, He was dead. Christ had been telling them what would happen, but they did not listen. Christ appeared in His resurrection body before Mary and over 500 others. Completely restored. She did not expect to see Him not beaten, bruised and bloodied. There was one thing that changed Mary’s perspective.....His voice. When she heard His voice, she immediately clung to Jesus! **John 10:27-28**: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." 28) And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. This passage highlights the relationship between Jesus and His followers, indicating that those who belong to Him recognize and respond to His voice.

And when she clung to Jesus, it was like greeting a missing person, who had just been found. This must have lasted for some time, because Mary loved the Lord. Jesus had to say, Stop clinging to me! For I have not yet ascended to the Father.

At first, it may seem that the Lord didn’t want her affection, but Mary loved the Lord with everything she had in herself, and it wasn’t that she was clinging for longer than she should have and annoying the Lord. It was that the mission was not yet complete. He still needed to ascend to Heaven where God the Father would

tell Him to sit down on His throne, fulfilling the role of His Kingship.

Now we have just witnessed our pastor transitioning out of the ministry, because of his health, but The Mission isn't finished yet church! God's plan continues; no matter who is in the pulpit. It is only a transition – As a man of God completes his work in ministry, God puts another prepared believer in his place to continue His work. We will be fine. God's next chapter for this church congregation, is all in His sovereign plan. Be prayerful and trust the Lord.

